

## PD WEEKLY – VOL. 2, ISS. 4



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**WALT WHITMAN  
THE DIAL  
ELIZABETH LEAVITT KELLER  
MAURICE CLARE**

## I HEAR AMERICA SINGING

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,  
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong,  
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,  
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,  
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deckhand  
singing on the steamboat deck,  
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as  
he stands,  
The wood-cutter's song, the ploughboy's on his way in the morning,  
or at noon intermission or at sundown,  
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work,  
or of the girl sewing or washing,  
Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,  
The day what belongs to the day--at night the party of young  
fellows, robust, friendly,  
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.



## EDITORIAL FROM THE DIAL, 5/31/1919

Today, Walt Whitman is one hundred years old. During the century since his birth his States have evolved a scene very different from that crude and spacious panorama, extending westward from a narrow selvage of provincial elegance to a fabulous frontier, which seems to us the congruous background for his rugged figure. Yet we feel—those of us who attend him at all—that he was spiritually more nearly our contemporary than were any of the other men of letters whose centenaries we have lately celebrated or are soon to celebrate. Many of them represented, more easily and intimately perhaps than Whitman the poet ever represented anything, the textures of the particular segments of life that enclosed them; but in a large loose way Whit

man the man increasingly typifies for us the general canvas of that life. At the same time, and even while the scene which he proclaimed as American recedes into a conveniently remote golden age in our national consciousness, Whitman the prophet advances upon us as spokesman for what we like to think are our enduring ideals. No doubt this is the normal career for the prophet: his time melts into history as a single luminous page; he himself is purged and canonized as its surviving hero. Now if there is any social validity in this prophet-making process, it is perhaps less futile than many think it to be to cull from the master's works passages of plausible contemporary pertinence—"prophecies." Not that the prophet will actually have anticipated the conditions or events to which his words are thus applied, but that he will enrich his readers' desires and thoughts with something of the combined dignity and familiar warmth, of the clearer and closer community of purpose, that accrues from a continuing tradition and that no age can achieve for itself in isolation. Therefore it is not necessary to believe that when Whitman wrote *Years of the Modern* he was predicting the kind of European war we have just passed through, or the sort of peace we are debating, or the Russian Revolution, or any fortunate sequels to any of these events, in order to warm our newer faith in freedom at the fire of his lines:

What historic denouements are those we so rapidly approach ?  
I see men marching and countermarching by swift millions,  
I see the frontiers and boundaries of the old autocracies broken,  
I see the landmarks of European Kings removed,  
I see this day the people beginning their landmarks (all others give way).  
What whispers are these, O lands, running ahead of you, passing under the seas!  
Are all nations communing?



## **PREFACE TO "LEAVES OF GRASS"**

By Walt Whitman, 1855

America does not repel the past, or what the past has produced under its forms, or amid other politics, or the idea of castes, or the old religions--accepts the lesson with calmness--is not impatient because the slough still sticks to opinions and manners in literature, while the life which served its requirements has passed into the new life of the new forms--perceives that the corpse is slowly borne from the eating and sleeping rooms of the house--perceives that it waits a little while in the door--that it was fittest for its days--that its action has descended to the stalwart and well-shaped heir who approaches--and that he shall be fittest for his days.

The Americans of all nations at any time upon the earth, have probably the fullest poetical nature. The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem. In the history of the earth hitherto, the largest and most stirring appear tame and orderly to their ampler largeness and stir. Here at last is something in the doings of man that corresponds with the broadcast doings of the day and night. Here is action untied from strings, necessarily blind to particulars and details, magnificently moving in masses. Here is the hospitality which for ever indicates heroes. Here the performance, disdaining the trivial, unapproach'd in the tremendous audacity of its crowds and groupings, and the push of its perspective, spreads with crampless and flowing breadth, and showers its prolific and splendid extravagance. One sees it must indeed own the riches of the summer and winter, and need never be bankrupt while corn grows from the ground, or the orchards drop apples, or the bays contain fish, or men beget children upon women.

Other states indicate themselves in their deputies--but the genius of the United States is not best or most in its executives or legislatures, nor in its ambassadors or authors, or colleges or churches or parlors, nor even in its newspapers or inventors--but always most in the common people, south, north, west, east, in all its States, through all its mighty amplitude. The largeness of the nation, however, were monstrous without a corresponding largeness and generosity of the spirit of the citizen. Not swarming states, nor streets and steamships, nor prosperous business, nor farms, nor capital, nor learning, may suffice for the

ideal of man--nor suffice the poet. No reminiscences may suffice either. A live nation can always cut a deep mark, and can have the best authority the cheapest--namely, from its own soul. This is the sum of the profitable uses of individuals or states, and of present action and grandeur, and of the subjects of poets. (As if it were necessary to trot back generation after generation to the eastern records! As if the beauty and sacredness of the demonstrable must fall behind that of the mythical! As if men do not make their mark out of any times! As if the opening of the western continent by discovery, and what has transpired in North and South America, were less than the small theater of the antique, or the aimless sleep-walking of the middle ages!) The pride of the United States leaves the wealth and finesse of the cities, and all returns of commerce and agriculture, and all the magnitude of geography or shows of exterior victory, to enjoy the sight and realization of full-sized men, or one full-sized man unconquerable and simple.

The American poets are to inclose old and new, for America is the race of races. The expression of the American poet is to be transcendent and new. It is to be indirect, and not direct or descriptive or epic. Its quality goes through these to much more. Let the age and wars of other nations be chanted, and their eras and characters be illustrated, and that finish the verse. Not so the great psalm of the republic. Here the theme is creative, and has vista. Whatever stagnates in the flat of custom or obedience or legislation, the great poet never stagnates. Obedience does not master him, he masters it. High up out of reach he stands, turning a concentrated light--he turns the pivot with his finger--he baffles the swiftest runners as he stands, and easily overtakes and envelopes them. The time straying toward infidelity and confections and persiflage he withholds by steady faith. Faith is the antiseptic of the soul--it pervades the common people and preserves them--they never give up believing and expecting and trusting. There is that indescribable freshness and unconsciousness about an illiterate person, that humbles and mocks the power of the noblest expressive genius. The poet sees for a certainty how one not a great artist may be just as sacred and perfect as the greatest artist.

The power to destroy or remould is freely used by the greatest poet, but seldom the power of attack. What is past is past. If he does not expose superior models, and prove himself by every step he takes, he is not what is wanted. The presence of the great poet conquers--not parleying, or struggling, or any prepared attempts. Now he has passed that way, see after him! There is not left any vestige of despair, or misanthropy, or cunning, or exclusiveness, or the ignominy of a nativity or color, or delusion of hell or the necessity of hell--and no man thenceforward

shall be degraded for ignorance or weakness or sin. The greatest poet hardly knows pettiness or triviality. If he breathes into anything that was before thought small, it dilates with the grandeur and life of the universe. He is a seer--he is individual--he is complete in himself--the others are as good as he, only he sees it, and they do not. He is not one of the chorus--he does not stop for any regulation--he is the president of regulation. What the eyesight does to the rest, he does to the rest. Who knows the curious mystery of the eyesight? The other senses corroborate themselves, but this is removed from any proof but its own, and foreruns the identities of the spiritual world. A single glance of it mocks all the investigations of man, and all the instruments and books of the earth, and all reasoning. What is marvelous? what is unlikely? what is impossible or baseless or vague--after you have once just open'd the space of a peach-pit, and given audience to far and near, and to the sunset, and had all things enter with electric swiftness, softly and duly, without confusion or jostling or jam?

The land and sea, the animals, fishes and birds, the sky of heaven and the orbs, the forests, mountains and rivers, are not small themes--but folks expect of the poet to indicate more than the beauty and dignity which always attach to dumb real objects--they expect him to indicate the path between reality and their souls. Men and women perceive the beauty well enough--probably as well as he. The passionate tenacity of hunters, woodmen, early risers, cultivators of gardens and orchards and fields, the love of healthy women for the manly form, seafaring persons, drivers of horses, the passion for light and the open air, all is an old varied sign of the unfailing perception of beauty, and of a residence of the poetic in out-door people. They can never be assisted by poets to perceive--some may, but they never can. The poetic quality is not marshal'd in rhyme or uniformity, or abstract addresses to things, nor in melancholy complaints or good precepts, but is the life of these and much else, and is in the soul. The profit of rhyme is that it drops seeds of a sweeter and more luxuriant rhyme, and of uniformity that it conveys itself into its own roots in the ground out of sight. The rhyme and uniformity of perfect poems show the free growth of metrical laws, and bud from them as unerringly and loosely as lilacs and roses on a bush, and take shapes as compact as the shapes of chestnuts and oranges, and melons and pears, and shed the perfume impalpable to form. The fluency and ornaments of the finest poems or music or orations or recitations, are not independent but dependent. All beauty comes from beautiful blood and a beautiful brain. If the greatnesses are in conjunction in a man or woman, it is enough--the fact will prevail through the universe; but the gagery and gilt of a million years will

not prevail. Who troubles himself about his ornaments or fluency is lost. This is what you shall do: Love the earth and sun and the animals, despise riches, give alms to everyone that asks, stand up for the stupid and crazy, devote your income and labor to others, hate tyrants, argue not concerning God, have patience and indulgence toward the people, take off your hat to nothing known or unknown, or to any man or number of men--go freely with powerful uneducated persons, and with the young, and with the mothers of families--re-examine all you have been told in school or church or in any book, and dismiss whatever insults your own soul; and your very flesh shall be a great poem, and have the richest fluency, not only in its words, but in the silent lines of its lips and face, and between the lashes of your eyes, and in every motion and joint of your body. The poet shall not spend his time in unneeded work. He shall know that the ground is already plow'd and manured; others may not know it, but he shall. He shall go directly to the creation. His trust shall master the trust of everything he touches--and shall master all attachment.

The known universe has one complete lover, and that is the greatest poet. He consumes an eternal passion, and is indifferent which chance happens, and which possible contingency of fortune or misfortune, and persuades daily and hourly his delicious pay. What balks or breaks others is fuel for his burning progress to contact and amorous joy. Other proportions of the reception of pleasure dwindle to nothing to his proportions. All expected from heaven or from the highest, he is rapport with in the sight of the daybreak, or the scenes of the winter woods, or the presence of children playing, or with his arm round the neck of a man or woman. His love above all love has leisure and expanse--he leaves room ahead of himself. He is no irresolute or suspicious lover--he is sure--he scorns intervals. His experience and the showers and thrills are not for nothing. Nothing can jar him--suffering and darkness cannot--death and fear cannot. To him complaint and jealousy and envy are corpses buried and rotten in the earth--he saw them buried. The sea is not surer of the shore, or the shore of the sea, than he is of the fruition of his love, and of all perfection and beauty.

The fruition of beauty is no chance of miss or hit--it is as inevitable as life--it is exact and plumb as gravitation. From the eyesight proceeds another eyesight, and from the hearing proceeds another hearing, and from the voice proceeds another voice, eternally curious of the harmony of things with man. These understand the law of perfection in masses and floods--that it is profuse and impartial--that there is not a minute of the light or dark, nor an acre of the earth and sea, without it--nor any direction of the sky, nor any trade or employment,

nor any turn of events. This is the reason that about the proper expression of beauty there is precision and balance. One part does not need to be thrust above another. The best singer is not the one who has the most lithe and powerful organ. The pleasure of poems is not in them that take the handsomest measure and sound.

Without effort, and without exposing in the least how it is done, the greatest poet brings the spirit of any or all events and passions and scenes and persons, some more and some less, to bear on your individual character as you hear or read. To do this well is to compete with the laws that pursue and follow Time. What is the purpose must surely be there, and the clew of it must be there--and the faintest indication is the indication of the best, and then becomes the clearest indication. Past and present and future are not disjoin'd but join'd. The greatest poet forms the consistence of what is to be, from what has been and is. He drags the dead out of their coffins and stands them again on their feet. He says to the past, Rise and walk before me that I may realize you. He learns the lesson--he places himself where the future becomes present. The greatest poet does not only dazzle his rays over character and scenes and passions--he finally ascends, and finishes all--he exhibits the pinnacles that no man can tell what they are for, or what is beyond--he glows a moment on the extremest verge. He is most wonderful in his last half-hidden smile or frown; by that flash of the moment of parting the one that sees it shall be encouraged or terrified afterward for many years. The greatest poet does not moralize or make applications of morals--he knows the soul. The soul has that measureless pride which consists in never acknowledging any lessons or deductions but its own. But it has sympathy as measureless as its pride, and the one balances the other, and neither can stretch too far while it stretches in company with the other. The inmost secrets of art sleep with the twain. The greatest poet has lain close betwixt both, and they are vital in his style and thoughts.

The art of art, the glory of expression and the sunshine of the light of letters, is simplicity. Nothing is better than simplicity--nothing can make up for excess, or for the lack of definiteness. To carry on the heave of impulse and pierce intellectual depths and give all subjects their articulations, are powers neither common nor very uncommon. But to speak in literature with the perfect rectitude and insouciance of the movements of animals, and the unimpeachableness of the sentiment of trees in the woods and grass by the roadside, is the flawless triumph of art. If you have look'd on him who has achiev'd it you have look'd on one of the masters of the artists of all nations and times. You shall not contemplate the flight of the gray gull over the bay, or the



mettlesome action of the blood horse, or the tall leaning of sunflowers on their stalk, or the appearance of the sun journeying through heaven, or the appearance of the moon afterward, with any more satisfaction than you shall contemplate him. The great poet has less a mark'd style, and is more the channel of thoughts and things without increase or diminution, and is the free channel of himself. He swears to his art, I will not be meddlesome, I will not have in my writing any elegance, or effect, or originality, to hang in the way between me and the rest like curtains. I will have nothing hang in the way, not the richest curtains. What I tell I tell for precisely what it is. Let who may exalt or startle or fascinate or soothe, I will have purposes as health or heat or snow has, and be as regardless of observation. What I experience or portray shall go from my composition without a shred of my composition. You shall stand by my side and look in the mirror with me.

The old red blood and stainless gentility of great poets will be proved by their unconstraint. A heroic person walks at his ease through and out of that custom or precedent or authority that suits him not. Of the traits of the brotherhood of first-class writers, savans, musicians, inventors and artists, nothing is finer than silent defiance advancing from new free forms. In the need of poems, philosophy, politics, mechanism, science, behavior, the craft of art, an appropriate native grand opera, shipcraft, or any craft, he is greatest for ever and ever who contributes the greatest original practical example. The cleanest expression is that which finds no sphere worthy of itself, and makes one.

The messages of great poems to each man and woman are, Come to us on equal terms, only then can you understand us. We are no better than you, what we inclose you inclose, what we enjoy you may enjoy. Did you suppose there could be only one Supreme? We affirm there can be unnumber'd Supremes, and that one does not countervail another any more than one eyesight countervails another--and that men can be good or grand only of the consciousness of their supremacy within them. What do you think is the grandeur of storms and dismemberments, and the deadliest battles and wrecks, and the wildest fury of the elements, and the power of the sea, and the motion of Nature, and the throes of human desires, and dignity and hate and love? It is that something in the soul which says, Rage on, whirl on, I tread master here and everywhere--Master of the spasms of the sky and of the shatter of the sea, Master of nature and passion and death, and of all terror and all pain.

The American bards shall be mark'd for generosity and affection, and for encouraging competitors. They shall be Kosmos, without monopoly or

secrecy, glad to pass anything to anyone--hungry for equals night and day. They shall not be careful of riches and privilege--they shall be rich and privileged--they shall perceive who the most affluent man is. The most affluent man is he that confronts all the shows he sees by equivalents out of the stronger wealth of himself. The American bard shall delineate no class of persons, nor one or two out of the strata of interests, nor love most nor truth most, nor the soul most, nor the body most--and not be for the Eastern States more than the Western, or the Northern States more than the Southern.

Exact science and its practical movements are no checks on the greatest poet, but always his encouragement and support. The outset and remembrance are there--there the arms that lifted him first, and braced him best--there he returns after all his goings and comings. The sailor and traveler--the anatomist, chemist, astronomer, geologist, phrenologist, spiritualist, mathematician, historian, and lexicographer, are not poets, but they are the lawgivers of poets, and their construction underlies the structure of every perfect poem. No matter what rises or is utter'd, they sent the seed of the conception of it--of them and by them stand the visible proofs of souls. If there shall be love and content between the father and the son, and if the greatness of the son is the exuding of the greatness of the father, there shall be love between the poet and the man of demonstrable science. In the beauty of poems are henceforth the tuft and final applause of science.

Great is the faith of the flush of knowledge, and of the investigation of the depths of qualities and things. Cleaving and circling here swells the soul of the poet, yet is president of itself always. The depths are fathomless, and therefore calm. The innocence and nakedness are resumed--they are neither modest nor immodest. The whole theory of the supernatural, and all that was twined with it or educed out of it, departs as a dream. What has ever happen'd--what happens, and whatever may or shall happen, the vital laws inclose all. They are sufficient for any case and for all cases--none to be hurried or retarded--any special miracle of affairs or persons inadmissible in the vast clear scheme where every motion and every spear of grass, and the frames and spirits of men and women and all that concerns them, are unspeakably perfect miracles, all referring to all, and each distinct and in its place. It is also not consistent with the reality of the soul to admit that there is anything in the known universe more divine than men and women.

Men and women, and the earth and all upon it, are to be taken as they are, and the investigation of their past and present and future shall be unintermitted, and shall be done with perfect candor. Upon this basis

philosophy speculates, ever looking towards the poet, ever regarding the eternal tendencies of all toward happiness, never inconsistent with what is clear to the senses and to the soul. For the eternal tendencies of all toward happiness make the only point of sane philosophy. Whatever comprehends less than that--whatever is less than the laws of light and of astronomical motion--or less than the laws that follow the thief, the liar, the glutton and the drunkard, through this life and doubtless afterward--or less than vast stretches of time, or the slow formation of density, or the patient upheaving of strata--is of no account. Whatever would put God in a poem or system of philosophy as contending against some being or influence, is also of no account. Sanity and ensemble characterize the great master--spoilt in one principle, all is spoilt. The great master has nothing to do with miracles. He sees health for himself in being one of the mass--he sees the hiatus in singular eminence. To the perfect shape comes common ground. To be under the general law is great, for that is to correspond with it. The master knows that he is unspeakably great, and that all are unspeakably great--that nothing, for instance, is greater than to conceive children, and bring them up well--that to be is just as great as to perceive or tell.

In the make of the great masters the idea of political liberty is indispensable. Liberty takes the adherence of heroes wherever man and woman exist--but never takes any adherence or welcome from the rest more than from poets. They are the voice and exposition of liberty. They out of ages are worthy the grand idea--to them it is confided, and they must sustain it. Nothing has precedence of it, and nothing can warp or degrade it.

As the attributes of the poets of the kosmos concenter in the real body, and in the pleasure of things, they possess the superiority of genuineness over all fiction and romance. As they emit themselves, facts are shower'd over with light--the daylight is lit with more volatile light--the deep between the setting and rising sun goes deeper many fold. Each precise object or condition or combination or process exhibits a beauty--the multiplication table its--old age its--the carpenter's trade its--the grand opera its--the huge-hull'd clean-shap'd New York clipper at sea under steam or full sail gleams with unmatched beauty--the American circles and large harmonies of government gleam with theirs--and the commonest definite intentions and actions with theirs. The poets of the kosmos advance through all interpositions and coverings and turmoils and stratagems to first principles. They are of use--they dissolve poverty from its need, and riches from its conceit. You large proprietor, they say, shall not realize or perceive more than

anyone else. The owner of the library is not he who holds a legal title to it, having bought and paid for it. Anyone and everyone is owner of the library, (indeed he or she alone is owner,) who can read the same through all the varieties of tongues and subjects and styles, and in whom they enter with ease, and make supple and powerful and rich and large.

These American States, strong and healthy and accomplish'd, shall receive no pleasure from violations of natural models, and must not permit them. In paintings or mouldings or carvings in mineral or wood, or in the illustrations of books or newspapers, or in the patterns of woven stuffs, or anything to beautify rooms or furniture or costumes, or to put upon cornices or monuments, or on the prows or sterns of ships, or to put anywhere before the human eye indoors or out, that which distorts honest shapes, or which creates unearthly beings or places or contingencies, is a nuisance and revolt. Of the human form especially, it is so great it must never be made ridiculous. Of ornaments to a work nothing outre can be allow'd--but those ornaments can be allow'd that conform to the perfect facts of the open air, and that flow out of the nature of the work, and come irrepressibly from it, and are necessary to the completion of the work. Most works are most beautiful without ornament. Exaggerations will be revenged in human physiology. Clean and vigorous children are jetted and conceiv'd only in those communities where the models of natural forms are public every day. Great genius and the people of these States must never be demean'd to romances. As soon as histories are properly told, no more need of romances.

The great poets are to be known by the absence in them of tricks, and by the justification of perfect personal candor. All faults may be forgiven of him who has perfect candor. Henceforth let no man of us lie, for we have seen that openness wins the inner and outer world, and that there is no single exception, and that never since our earth gather'd itself in a mass have deceit or subterfuge or prevarication attracted its smallest particle or the faintest tinge of a shade--and that through the enveloping wealth and rank of a state, or the whole republic of states, a sneak or sly person shall be discover'd and despised--and that the soul has never once been fool'd and never can be fool'd--and thrift without the loving nod of the soul is only a foetid puff--and there never grew up in any of the continents of the globe, nor upon any planet or satellite, nor in that condition which precedes the birth of babes, nor at any time during the changes of life, nor in any stretch of abeyance or action of vitality, nor in any process of formation or reformation anywhere, a being whose instinct hated the truth.

Extreme caution or prudence, the soundest organic health, large hope and comparison and fondness for women and children, large alimentiveness and destructiveness and causality, with a perfect sense of the oneness of nature, and the propriety of the same spirit applied to human affairs, are called up of the float of the brain of the world to be parts of the greatest poet from his birth out of his mother's womb, and from her birth out of her mother's. Caution seldom goes far enough. It has been thought that the prudent citizen was the citizen who applied himself to solid gains, and did well for himself and for his family, and completed a lawful life without debt or crime. The greatest poet sees and admits these economies as he sees the economies of food and sleep, but has higher notions of prudence than to think he gives much when he gives a few slight attentions at the latch of the gate. The premises of the prudence of life are not the hospitality of it, or the ripeness and harvest of it. Beyond the independence of a little sum laid aside for burial-money, and of a few clap-boards around and shingles overhead on a lot of American soil own'd, and the easy dollars that supply the year's plain clothing and meals, the melancholy prudence of the abandonment of such a great being as a man is, to the toss and pallor of years of money-making, with all their scorching days and icy nights, and all their stifling deceits and underhand dodgings, or infinitesimals of parlors, or shameless stuffing while others starve, and all the loss of the bloom and odor of the earth, and of the flowers and atmosphere, and of the sea, and of the true taste of the women and men you pass or have to do with in youth or middle age, and the issuing sickness and desperate revolt at the close of a life without elevation or naïveté, (even if you have achiev'd a secure 10,000 a year, or election to Congress or the Governorship,) and the ghastly chatter of a death without serenity or majesty, is the great fraud upon modern civilization and forethought, blotching the surface and system which civilization undeniably drafts, and moistening with tears the immense features it spreads and spreads with such velocity before the reach'd kisses of the soul.

Ever the right explanation remains to be made about prudence. The prudence of the mere wealth and respectability of the most esteem'd life appears too faint for the eye to observe at all, when little and large alike drop quietly aside at the thought of the prudence suitable for immortality. What is the wisdom that fills the thinness of a year, or seventy or eighty years--to the wisdom spaced out by ages, and coming back at a certain time with strong reinforcements and rich presents, and the clear faces of wedding-guests as far as you can look, in every direction, running gayly toward you? Only the soul is of itself--all else has reference to what ensues. All that a person does or thinks is

of consequence. Nor can the push of charity or personal force ever be anything else than the profoundest reason, whether it brings argument to hand or no. No specification is necessary--to add or subtract or divide is in vain. Little or big, learn'd or unlearn'd, white or black, legal or illegal, sick or well, from the first inspiration down the windpipe to the last expiration out of it, all that a male or female does that is vigorous and benevolent and clean is so much sure profit to him or her in the unshakable order of the universe, and through the whole scope of it forever. The prudence of the greatest poet answers at last the craving and glut of the soul, puts off nothing, permits no let-up for its own case or any case, has no particular sabbath or judgment day, divides not the living from the dead, or the righteous from the unrighteous, is satisfied with the present, matches every thought or act by its correlative, and knows no possible forgiveness or deputed atonement.

The direct trial of him who would be the greatest poet is to-day. If he does not flood himself with the immediate age as with vast oceanic tides--if he be not himself the age transfigur'd, and if to him is not open'd the eternity which gives similitude to all periods and locations and processes, and animate and inanimate forms, and which is the bond of time, and rises up from its inconceivable vagueness and infiniteness in the swimming shapes of to-day, and is held by the ductile anchors of life, and makes the present spot the passage from what was to what shall be, and commits itself to the representation of this wave of an hour, and this one of the sixty beautiful children of the wave--let him merge in the general run, and wait his development.

Still the final test of poems, or any character or work, remains. The prescient poet projects himself centuries ahead, and judges performer or performance after the changes of time. Does it live through them? Does it still hold on untired? Will the same style, and the direction of genius to similar points, be satisfactory now? Have the marches of tens and hundreds and thousands of years made willing detours to the right hand and the left hand for his sake? Is he beloved long and long after he is buried? Does the young man think often of him? and the young woman think often of him? and do the middle-aged and the old think of him?

A great poem is for ages and ages in common, and for all degrees and complexions, and all departments and sects, and for a woman as much as a man, and a man as much as a woman. A great poem is no finish to a man or woman, but rather a beginning. Has anyone fancied he could sit at last under some due authority, and rest satisfied with explanations, and realize, and be content and full? To no such terminus does the greatest

poet bring--he brings neither cessation nor shelter'd fatness and ease.  
The touch of him, like Nature, tells in action. Whom he takes he takes  
with firm sure grasp into live regions previously unattain'd--thenceforward  
is no rest--they see the space and ineffable sheen that turn the old  
spots and lights into dead vacuums. Now there shall be a man cohered out  
of tumult and chaos--the elder encourages the younger and shows him  
how--they two shall launch off fearlessly together till the new world  
fits an orbit for itself, and looks unabash'd on the lesser orbits of  
the stars, and sweeps through the ceaseless rings, and shall never be  
quiet again.

There will soon be no more priests. Their work is done. A new order  
shall arise, and they shall be the priests of man, and every man shall  
be his own priest. They shall find their inspiration in real objects  
to-day, symptoms of the past and future. They shall not deign to defend  
immortality or God, or the perfection of things, or liberty, or the  
exquisite beauty and reality of the soul. They shall arise in America,  
and be responded to from the remainder of the earth.

The English language befriends the grand American expression--it is  
brawny enough, and limber and full enough. On the tough stock of a race  
who through all change of circumstance was never without the idea of  
political liberty, which is the animus of all liberty, it has attracted  
the terms of daintier and gayer and subtler and more elegant tongues. It  
is the powerful language of resistance--it is the dialect of common  
sense. It is the speech of the proud and melancholy races, and of all  
who aspire. It is the chosen tongue to express growth, faith,  
self-esteem, freedom, justice, equality, friendliness, amplitude,  
prudence, decision, and courage. It is the medium that shall wellnigh  
express the inexpressible.

No great literature nor any like style of behavior or oratory, or social  
intercourse or household arrangements, or public institutions, or the  
treatment by bosses of employ'd people, nor executive detail, or detail  
of the army and navy, nor spirit of legislation or courts, or police or  
tuition or architecture, or songs or amusements, can long elude the  
jealous and passionate instinct of American standards. Whether or no the  
sign appears from the mouths of the people, it throbs a live  
interrogation in every freeman's and freewoman's heart, after that which  
passes by, or this built to remain. Is it uniform with my country? Are  
its disposals without ignominious distinctions? Is it for the  
ever-growing communes of brothers and lovers, large, well united, proud,  
beyond the old models, generous beyond all models? Is it something grown  
fresh out of the fields, or drawn from the sea for use to me to-day

here? I know that what answers for me, an American, in Texas, Ohio, Canada, must answer for any individual or nation that serves for a part of my materials. Does this answer? Is it for the nursing of the young of the republic? Does it solve readily with the sweet milk of the nipples of the breasts of the Mother of Many Children?

America prepares with composure and good-will for the visitors that have sent word. It is not intellect that is to be their warrant and welcome. The talented, the artist, the ingenious, the editor, the statesman, the erudite, are not unappreciated--they fall in their place and do their work. The soul of the nation also does its work. It rejects none, it permits all. Only toward the like of itself will it advance half-way. An individual is as superb as a nation when he has the qualities which make a superb nation. The soul of the largest and wealthiest and proudest nation may well go half-way to meet that of its poets.



## **MR. WHITMAN DRIVES**

"\_I swear I will never again mention love or death inside a house, and I swear I will never translate myself at all, only to him or her who privately stays with me in the open air.\_" --WALT WHITMAN.

"\_For such a lover of nature not to be able to get out of doors, was a calamity than which no greater was known.\_" --THOMAS DONALDSON.

The first winter over, spring came and was passed in about the same daily routine; but before the summer was far advanced Mrs. Davis was convinced that the old man's walking days were rapidly drawing to a complete close. This troubled her greatly, and during one of Mr. Thomas Donaldson's frequent evening visits she talked earnestly with him about it.

Mr. Donaldson, the poet's intimate and constant friend, was a practical man; one ready to listen to the suggestions of others, and to assist in forwarding their plans. Between him and Mrs. Davis there was a mutual



understanding; each knew the other's worth. He had always shown consideration for her; had sought her out in her own house, and stood manfully by her side in her ministrations to the invalid.

She told him she was certain, from the number of letters Mr. Whitman received, his many visitors from other cities and abroad, his increasing list of invitations and requests for personal interviews, that he must be a man in whom others were deeply interested.

She said that for some time she had had a plan in her mind. It was this: that he should write to Mr. Whitman's friends--as he knew just who they were--and solicit a subscription of ten dollars from each of them, the fund to be appropriated to the purchase of a horse and carriage for the poet's use.

Mr. Donaldson fell in with the scheme, and thirty-one of the thirty-five letters written by him received prompt replies, and in each was the sum asked for. As the gift was to be a surprise, only a few friends were let into the secret. A comfortable buggy was ordered and a gentle pony selected, as it was supposed the drives would be quiet ones, in suburban places.

On the fifteenth of September all was completed, and Mr. Donaldson came over in the afternoon, ostensibly to make a call. He found his friend on a lounge in the front room, and seating himself commenced to chat with him upon the topics of the times. This he continued to do until he heard the gift carriage drive up to the door. His young son Blaine sat by the driver's side.

Mr. Donaldson went to the window, and Mr. Whitman hobbled after him to see who had arrived. "Bless me," he said, "what a fine turnout! And there is Blaine! Well, well, how the lad does seem to fit it; how comfortable it does look! What does it all mean?"

"It certainly does look comfortable," Mr. Donaldson replied, "and Walt, it's yours." This statement he repeated twice before his astonished friend could believe he had heard aright, and even then he did not appear to take in or comprehend the full meaning of such an announcement. While still dazed and hardly himself--impassive as was his natural demeanor--his friend handed him a letter containing the names of the contributors, in an envelope with \$135.40 enclosed. Mr. Whitman read the letter and was completely overcome; tears trickled down his cheeks, and he was unable to articulate a word.

When he was somewhat composed, Mrs. Davis, who had been slyly watching the scene, came in with his coat and hat, and proposed that he should at once--and for the first time--take a drive in a turnout of his own. It proved to be a long drive, as it was late in the afternoon when he returned.

Mrs. Davis was delighted; the gift surpassed her highest expectations, was much nicer and more expensive than she had thought it was to be; and she rejoiced to see the poor old man, who not two years before had shuffled to her door, now riding in a carriage of his own!--and one provided, too, by those friends he had told her of, friends she had believed to be but myths conjured up in his own lonesome mind.

Mr. Whitman deeply appreciated the compliment paid him. He said: "I have before now been made to feel in many touching ways how kind and thoughtful my loving friends are, but this present is so handsome and valuable, and comes so opportunely, and is so thoroughly a surprise, that I can hardly realize it. My paralysis has made me so lame lately that I have had to give up my walks. Oh! I shall have a famous time this fall!"

Previous to the presentation an arrangement had been made at a nearby stable for the care of the horse, the running expense of which was to be met by a number of friends; a young man was also engaged to harness the horse and drive the rig to the door. But who was to summon it? That part being unprovided for, it fell to Mrs. Davis, and Mr. Whitman became as erratic with his horse as he was with all other things. Some mornings it would be: "I must give up my ride to-day, the weather is so uncertain"; soon after: "It looks like clearing up, I will go"; then on Mrs. Davis's return from the stable: "I have made up my mind to defer my ride." Again would come the determination to go, followed with the afterthought of remaining at home, until ordering the carriage and countermanding the order would keep the obliging messenger running to and from the stable until dark.

Riding was so great an enjoyment to Mr. Whitman that when once in his carriage he was loth to leave it. "Only one thing seemed to have the power of forcing from him an occasional lament, and that was prolonged stormy weather when bad health kept him indoors for days and weeks."

Poor Frank, the pony, had not been selected for speed or endurance, and in an amazingly short time he succumbed to over-driving. At the expiration of only two months, Mr. Donaldson says, "the pony showed the effects of Mr. Whitman's fast driving, and had a shake in the

forelegs--or rather tremble--that gave the impression that he was getting ready to lie down.... Some weeks after this I was again in Camden, and while on the main street I saw a cloud of dust rising from a fast-approaching vehicle. In a moment a splendid bay horse attached to a buggy came into view. He was coming in a mile in three minutes' gait, and to my amazement, in the buggy was Walt Whitman holding on to the lines with one hand for dear life. When he observed me, he drew up with great difficulty and called out, 'Hello, Tom, ain't he splendid?' My breath was about gone. I managed to speak. 'Mr. Whitman, in the name of common sense what has come over you? Where is Frank?' 'Sold; I sold him. He was groggy in the knees and too slow. This horse is a goer, and delights me with his motion.'"

The ready sale of Frank was a great mortification to Mrs. Davis, and she felt it keenly; the more so as the pony had been, in a measure, the outcome of her suggestion.

Although the horse and carriage were "a source of infinite joy and satisfaction to Mr. Whitman, and aided him to pass three years of his invalid life in comparative ease, giving him touches of life and air and scenery otherwise impossible," they were a constant expense and vexation to others.

He seldom went for a drive alone, and as a rule chose as his companion one of the many young men of his acquaintance. He always wished to hold the lines himself. Although Mrs. Davis was the usual messenger to and from the stable, although she got her charge ready for his drives, assisted him to the carriage and almost lifted him in and out of it, neither he nor anyone else ever proposed that she should have the pleasure of a drive, or suggested that an occasional airing might do her good.

While owning the horse Mr. Whitman did not wholly discontinue his ferry rides, but he no longer "haunted the Delaware River front" as formerly.

What a change two years had made in his surroundings!--and what a change in those of Mary Davis! He had come more prominently before the great world; she had nearly passed out of her own limited sphere. The tide which turned when they entered the Mickle Street house was now in full flood for him. But what for her?

His book had had a good sale; private contributions were sent to him, amounting to many hundreds of dollars; and from this time on he did little with his pen, though he got occasional lifts from periodicals for

both old and new work, and the New York Herald paid him a regular salary as one of its editorial staff. But he resigned this position the following year.

From: The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Walt Whitman in Mickle Street*, by Elizabeth Leavitt Keller



## **A DAY WITH WALT WHITMAN.**

About six o'clock on a midsummer morning in 1877, a tall old man awoke, and was out of bed next moment,--but he moved with a certain slow leisureliness, as one who will not be hurried. The reason of this deliberate movement was obvious,--he had to drag a paralysed leg, which was only gradually recovering its ability and would always be slightly lame. Seen more closely, he was not by any means so old as at first sight one might imagine. His snow-white hair and almost-white grey beard indicated some eighty years: but he was vigorous, erect and rosy: his clear grey-blue eyes were bright with a "wild-hawk look,"--his face was firm and without a line. An air of splendid vital force, despite his infirmity, was diffused from his whole person, and defied the fact of his actual age, which was two years short of sixty.

Dressing with the same large, leisurely gestures as characterized him in everything, Walt Whitman was presently attired in his invariable suit of grey: and by the time the clock touched half-past seven, he was seated in the verandah, comfortably inhaling the sweet, fresh morning air, and quite ready for his simple breakfast.

In this old farmhouse, in the New Jersey hamlet of White Horse, Walt Whitman had been long an inmate. He was recovering by almost imperceptible degrees from the breakdown induced by over-strain, mental and physical, which had culminated in intermittent paralytic seizures for the last eight years, and had left his robust physique a mere wreck

of its former magnificence. Here, in the absolute peace and seclusion of the little wooden house, with its few fields and fruit-trees, he lived in lovable companionship with the farmer-folk, man, wife and sons: and here, the level, faintly undulated country, "neither attractive nor unattractive," supplied all the needs of his strenuous nature and healed him with its calm, curative influences. He steeped himself, month by month, season after season, in "primitive solitudes, winding stream, recluse and woody banks, sweet-feeding springs and all the charms that birds, grass, wild-flowers, rabbits and squirrels, old oaks, walnut-trees, etc., can bring." Simple fare, these charms might seem to a townsman: to the "good grey poet" they were not only sufficient but inexhaustible. Dearly as he loved the "swarming and tumultuous" life of cities, the tops of Broadway omnibuses, the Brooklyn ferry-boats, the eternal panorama of the multitude, his true delight was in the vast expanses, the illimitable spaces, the very earth from which, Antæus-like, he drew his vital strength. Out here, in the country solitudes, alone could he observe how--in a way undreamed of by the street-dweller,--

Ever upon this stage  
Is acted God's calm annual drama,  
Gorgeous processions, songs of birds,  
Sunrise that fullest feeds and freshens most the soul,  
The heaving sea, the waves upon the shore, the musical, strong waves,  
The woods, the stalwart trees, the slender, tapering trees,  
The lilliput countless armies of the grass.

#### ( \_The Return of the Heroes.\_ )

It may be doubted whether any other poet who has been inspired by outdoor Nature, has approximated so closely as Whitman to the "shows of all variety," which nature presents,--from the infinite gradations of microscopic detail, to the enormous range and sweep of dim vastitudes. His poetry has a huge elemental quality, akin to that of winds and clouds and seas. "To speak with the perfect rectitude and insouciance of the movements of animals, and the unimpeachableness of the sentiment of trees in the woods and grass by the roadside,"--this was the standard he had set himself: and, in pursuance of this ideal, he had given his first and most typically unconventional volume the title "\_Leaves of Grass\_." No name could better convey and sum up his meaning in art,--a commixture of the minute and the universal, the simple and the inexplicable, the particular and the all-pervading,--the commonplace which is also the miracle: for to Whitman leaves of grass were this and more. "To me," he declared, "as I lean and loaf at my ease, observing a spear of summer

grass,"

Every hour of the light and dark is a miracle--  
Every cubic inch of space is a miracle,

the grass-blades no less so than the "gentle soft-born measureless light." And, avowedly, from these external expressions of nature he derived all power of song--

I hear you whispering there, O stars of heaven--  
O suns--O grass of graves--O perpetual transfers and promotions,--  
If you do not say anything, how can I say anything?

Thus he had arrived at declaring, with august arrogance: "Let others finish specimens--I never finish specimens: I shower them by exhaustless laws as Nature does, fresh and modern continually."

Nor are you to suppose that this was a late development of nature-worship in a man suddenly confronted with teeming glories and wonderments. All through his life he had been soaking himself in the mysterious loveliness of the world around. "Even as a boy," he wrote, "I had the fancy, the wish, to write a poem about the seashore--that suggesting dividing line, contact, junction, the solid marrying the liquid--that curious, lurking something (as doubtless every objective form finally becomes to the subjective spirit) which means far more than its mere first sight, grand as that is.... I felt that I must one day write a book expressing this liquid, mystic theme. Afterward ... it came to me that instead of any special lyrical or epical or literary attempt, the seashore should be an invisible \_influence\_, a pervading gauge and tally for me in my composition." Even as a child, upon the desolate beaches of Long Island, he had, "leaving his bed, wandered alone, bare-headed, barefoot," over the sterile sands and the fields beyond, and explored the secret sources of tragedy that are hidden at the roots of love.

Once Paumanok,  
When the snows had melted--when the lilac-scent was in the air  
    and Fifth-month grass was growing,  
Up this seashore, in some briers,  
Two guests from Alabama--two together,  
And their nest, and four light-green eggs, spotted with brown,  
And every day the he-bird to and fro near at hand,  
And every day the she-bird crouch'd on her nest, silent, with bright  
    eyes,

And every day I, a curious boy, never too close, never disturbing  
them,  
Cautiously peering, absorbing, translating.

\* \* \* \* \*

Till of a sudden,  
May-be kill'd, unknown to her mate,  
One forenoon the she-bird crouch'd not on the nest,  
Nor return'd that afternoon, nor the next,  
Nor ever appear'd again.

And thenceforward all summer in the sound of the sea,  
And at night under the full of the moon in calmer weather....

Yes, when the stars glisten'd,  
All night long on the prong of a moss-scallop'd stake,  
Down, almost amid the slapping waves,  
Sat the lone singer wonderful causing tears

\* \* \* \* \*

I, with bare feet, a child, the wind wafting my hair,  
Listen'd long and long....

( \_Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking\_ ).

But now the Stafford family were assembled at breakfast and Walt limped in to join them. Courteously and simply he greeted the various members of the household,--the dark, silent, diligent Methodist father,--the spiritually-minded yet busy-handed mother,--the two young fellows, the married daughter and her little ones. He was the most domesticated, least troublesome of inmates, and his "large sweet presence" imparted something to the homely breakfast-table, something of benignity and tranquillity, which it had lacked before his entrance. "The best man I ever knew," Mrs. Stafford called him. Her sons adored him; and her grandchildren were almost like his own, in the love and confidence with which they curled themselves upon his great grey knee when the meal was over. For his affection for children, his sense of fatherhood, was a predominant trait of Whitman's character. Lonely, since his mother's death, he had lived as regards the closer human relationships: lonely, in this sense, he was doomed to remain. A veil of secrecy hung over his past life, which none had ever ventured to lift. Rumours of a lost mate, as in the song of the Alabama bird upon the shore,--of children whom he

never could claim,--hints of harsh fates and imperious destinies,  
occasionally penetrated that close-woven curtain of silence which  
covered his most intimate self. But only in his poems had he voiced his  
loneliness, and that with the tenderest poignancy of yearning for  
"better, loftier love's ideals, the divine wife, the sweet, eternal,  
perfect comrade"....

That woman who passionately clung to me.  
Again we wander, we love, we separate again,  
Again she holds me by the hand, I must not go,  
I see her close beside me with silent lips sad and tremulous.

\* \* \* \* \*

(Be not impatient--a little space--Know you, I salute the air, the  
ocean and the land,  
Every day, at sundown, for your dear sake, my love.)

And this was the man who had been blamed for his utter lack of "the  
romantic attitude towards women!" But Whitman was no light singer of  
casual empty love-lyrics; he was of sterner stuff than that.

No dainty dolce affettuoso I,  
Bearded, sun-burnt, gray-neck'd, forbidding, I have arrived.

\* \* \* \* \*

As breakfast passed, he spoke but little to his companions. His ordinary  
mood of "quiet yet cheerful serenity," lay gently on him, and he was  
content to sit almost silent, emanating that radiant power, that  
"effluence and inclusiveness as of the sun," which none could fail to  
note in him. When addressed, he only replied with the brief monosyllable  
"Ay? Ay?" (which he pronounced \_Oy? Oy?\_), and which, slightly inflected  
to answer various purposes, served him for all response.

[Illustration:

I, with bare feet, a child, the wind wafting my hair,  
Listen'd long and long....

( \_Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking\_ ).]

The meal was not yet over, for most of the family, when Whitman, rising  
abruptly with that startling \_brusquerie\_ which occasionally offended



his friends, observed "Ta-ta!" to everybody in general and departed--"as if he didn't care if he never saw us again!" remarked one of the young men. He left the house and strolled down the green lane, to a wide wooded hollow, where the stream called Timber Creek went winding among its lily-leaves beneath the trees. Here Whitman had found, a year before, "a particularly secluded little dell off one side by my creek ... filled with bushes, trees, grass, a group of willows, a straggling bank and a spring of delicious water running right through the middle of it, with two or three little cascades. Here (he) retreated every hot day" (\_Specimen Days\_),--and here, while the summer sun drew sweet aromatic odours from the tangled water-mints and cresses, he proceeded slowly now, carrying a portable chair, and with his pockets filled with note-books; for, as he truly avowed, "Wherever I go, winter or summer, city or country, alone at home or travelling, I \_must\_ take notes." He was about to make sure of a morning's unmitigated delight,--in the spot where he sought, "every day, seclusion--every day at least two or three hours of freedom, bathing, no talk, no bonds, no dress, no books, no manners."

And each step of the way was a pure joy to him. "What a day!" he murmured, "what an hour just passing! the luxury of riant grass and blowing breeze, with all the shows of sun and sky and perfect temperature, never before so filling me body and soul!" So rhapsodizing inwardly and drinking in the beauty of sight and sound, he proceeded, "still sauntering on, to the spring under the willows--musical as soft clinking glasses--pouring a sizeable stream, pure and clear, out from its vent where the bank arches over like a great brown shaggy eyebrow or mouth-roof--gurgling, gurgling ceaselessly; meaning, saying something, of course (if one could only translate it.)" (\_Specimen Days.\_)

Here he sat down awhile and revelled in sheer joy of summer opulence. He enumerated to himself,--laying a store of lovely recollections for future reference in darker days,--"The fervent heat, but so much more endurable in this pure air--the white and pink pond-blossoms, with great heart-shaped leaves, the glassy waters of the creek, the banks, with dense bushery and the picturesque beeches and shade and turf; the tremulous, reedy call of some bird from recesses, breaking the warm, indolent, half-voluptuous silence: the prevailing delicate, yet palpable, spicy, grassy, clovery perfume to my nostrils,--and over all, encircling all, to my sight and soul, the free space of the sky, transparent and blue," (\_Specimen Days.\_) and, "from old habit, pencilled down from time to time, almost automatically, moods, sights, hours, tints and outlines, on the spot." Minutes like these were the seed time of his art, if that can be called art which was almost one

with Nature. For Walt Whitman had, from the very outset, striven to obtain that fusion of identity with \_Natura Benigna\_, which, even if only momentary, bequeathes a lasting impression on the mind. He had always felt, with regard to his productions, that "There is a humiliating lesson one learns, in serene hours, of a fine day or night. Nature seems to look on all fixed-up poetry and art as something almost impertinent.... If I could indirectly show that we have met and fused, even if but only once, but enough--that we have really absorbed each other and understood each other,"--it sufficed him. Nothing less did: for he recognised that "after you have exhausted what there is in business, politics, conviviality, love and so on--have found that none of these finally satisfy, or permanently wear--what remains? Nature remains: to bring out from their torpid recesses, the affinities of a man or woman with the open air, the trees, fields, changes of seasons--the sun by day and the stars of heaven by night." And, while confessing, "I cannot divest my appetite of literature, yet I find myself eventually trying it all by Nature--\_first premises\_ many call it, but really the crowning results of all, laws, tallies and proofs.... I have fancied the ocean and the daylight, the mountain and the forest, putting their spirit in a judgment on our books. I have fancied some disembodied soul giving its verdict." (\_Specimen Days.\_) He was "so afraid," as he phrased it, "of dropping what smack of outdoors or sun or starlight might cling to the lines--I dared not try to meddle with or smooth them." To be "made one with Nature," in a deeper sense than ever any man yet had known, was, in short, his ideal,--and, one may say, his achievement. For the verdict of the average person, vacant of \_his\_ glorious gains, he did not care. Regardless of ridicule, calumny, contumely, he had pursued his own way to his own goal: till he was able at last to realize his dream of--

Me imperturbe, standing at ease in Nature,  
Master of all, or mistress of all--aplomb in the midst of irrational  
things.

And now he was an old man, to look upon,--yet a man surcharged with electric vigour and daily renewing his physical strength from the fountains of eternal youth. He was just as full of \_élan\_, of enterprise, of the glorious hunger for adventure, as when first he had proclaimed,--

Afoot and light-hearted, I take to the open road,  
Healthy, free, the world before me,  
The long brown path before me, leading wherever I choose.

Allons! to that which is endless, as it was beginningless,  
To undergo much, tramps of days, rests of nights,  
To merge all in the travel they tend to, and the days and nights  
they tend to,  
Again to merge them in the start of superior journeys;  
To see nothing anywhere but what you may reach it and pass it,  
To look up or down no road but it stretches and waits for  
you--however long, but it stretches and waits for you;  
To see no being, not God's or any, but you also go thither.

( \_Song of the Open Road.\_ )

The big grey man expanded almost visibly in the sun-steeped air, as he absorbed the exquisite minutiae of the green dell into his mind, and assimilated the music of the wind and stream. Sound of any sort had a powerfully emotional effect upon him. It was not mere fancy on Whitman's part that "he and Wagner made one music." With music on the most colossal scale his poems are fraught from end to end: and while their technical form may be less finished, less perfected, than those of other authors,--while they have less melody, they have the multitudinous harmony, the superb architectonics, the choral and symphonic movement of the noblest masters. "Such poems as \_The Mystic Trumpeter\_, \_Out of the Cradle\_, \_Passage to India\_, have the genesis and exodus of great musical compositions." And to many auditors, the "vast elemental sympathy" of this unique personality can only be compared to that of Beethoven, whom he said he had "discovered as a new meaning in music:" Beethoven, by whom he allowed he "had been carried out of himself, seeing, hearing wonders:" Beethoven, who, like himself, sought inspiration continuously in the magic and mystery of Nature.

[Illustration: THE LUMBERMEN'S CAMP.

Lumbermen in their winter camp, day-break in the woods, stripes of  
snow on the limbs of trees, the occasional snapping,  
The glad clear sound of one's own voice, the merry song, the natural  
life of the woods, the strong day's work,  
The blazing fire at night, the sweet taste of supper, the talk, the  
bed of hemlock boughs, and the bear-skin.

( \_Song of the Broad-Axe\_. )]

And thus, all Whitman's finest poems have a processional air, like the evolution of some great symphony--a pageantry of sound, so to speak, which whirls one forward like a leaf upon a resistless stream. Sometimes

he is superbly triumphant, as in his inaugural Song of Myself :

With music strong I come--with my cornets and my drums,  
I play not marches for accepted victors only,  
I play great marches for conquer'd and slain persons.

Sometimes he translates the sonorities of the air into immortal effluences of meaning:

Hark, some wild trumpeter--some strange musician,  
Hovering unseen in air, vibrates capricious tunes to-night....

Blow, trumpeter, free and clear--I follow thee,  
While at thy liquid prelude, glad, serene,  
The fretting world, the streets, the noisy hours of day, withdraw;

or he blends all sorts and conditions of beautiful resonance into, surely, the strangest yet loveliest love-song ever yet set down:

I heard you, solemn-sweet pipes of the organ, as last Sunday morn I  
pass'd the church,  
Winds of autumn, as I walked the woods at dusk, I heard your  
long-stretch'd sighs up above so mournful,  
I heard the perfect Italian tenor singing at the opera, I heard the  
soprano in the midst of the quartet singing;  
Heart of my love! you too I heard murmuring low through one of the  
wrists around my head,  
Heard the pulse of you, when all was still, ringing little bells  
last night under my ear.

But now the precious hour had arrived, which to Whitman spelt revivification and rejuvenescence above all others: the time when, stripped of all externals, he became the very child of Mother Earth. In his own description of the process:

"A light south-west wind was blowing through the tree-tops. It was just the place and time for my Adamic air-bath.... So, hanging clothes on a rail near by, keeping old broadbrim straw on head and easy shoes on feet ... then partially bathing in the clear waters of the running brook--taking everything very leisurely, with many rests and pauses ... slow negligent promenades on the turf up and down in the sun ... somehow I seemed to get identity with each and everything around me, in its condition. Perhaps the inner, never-lost rapport we hold with earth, light, air, trees, etc., is not to be realized through eyes and mind

only, but through the whole corporeal body." (\_Specimen Days.\_)

Power and joy and exhilaration infused his whole frame. "Here," he murmured, "I realize the meaning of that old fellow who said he was seldom less alone than when alone. Never before did I get so close to Nature: never before did she come so close to me."

And a miracle of transient transformation had been wrought upon him. His youth was "renewed like the eagle's," his lameness hardly perceptible, as he reluctantly emerged from the sweet water, and, having dried himself in the sun-glow, still more reluctantly dressed again. This was no longer the "battered, wrecked old man," the veteran of life-long battles with the world: but one who could realize with keenest perception every sensation of stalwart strength. He might have been, at this moment, one of his own "lumbermen in their winter camp," enjoying

Day-break in the woods, stripes of snow on the limbs of trees,  
the occasional snapping,  
The glad clear sound of one's own voice, the merry song, the natural  
life of the woods, the strong day's work,  
The blazing fire at night, the sweet taste of supper, the talk, the  
bed of hemlock boughs, and the bear-skin.

(\_Song of the Broad-Axe.\_)

or a scion of the "youthful sinewy races," whom he had chanted in  
\_Pioneers\_:

Come, my tan-faced children,  
Follow well in order, get your weapons ready;  
Have you your pistols? have you your sharp-edged axes?  
Pioneers! O pioneers!...

All the past we leave behind!  
We debouch upon a newer, mightier world, varied world;  
Fresh and strong the world we seize, world of labour and the march,  
Pioneers! O pioneers!

Here at last was the true Walt Whitman, superabundant in splendid vitality and conscious of mental and physical power through every fibre of his being.

[Illustration: THE PIONEERS.

All the past we leave behind!  
We debouch upon a newer, mightier world,....

Down the edges, through the passes, up the mountains steep....  
Pioneers! O Pioneers!

(\_Pioneers.\_)]

One last longing, loving look he cast upon the creek before returning homewards. The magnificent mid-noon lay full-tide over all, brimming the uttermost shores of beauty: it was the very apotheosis of summer, the tangible realization of Whitman's prophetic vision.

All, all for immortality,  
Love like the light silently wrapping all,  
Nature's amelioration blessing all,  
The blossoms, fruits of ages, orchards divine and certain,  
Forms, objects, growths, humanities, to spiritual images ripening.  
Give me, O God, to sing that thought,  
Give me, give him or her I love this quenchless faith,  
In Thy ensemble, whatever else withheld withhold not from us  
Belief in plan of Thee enclosed in Time and Space,  
Health, peace, salvation universal.

Is it a dream?  
Nay but the lack of it the dream,  
And failing it life's lore and wealth a dream,  
And all the world a dream.

\* \* \* \* \*

Now he passed back up the lane to the little farmstead, and, entering in, found the midday meal was served. Mr. Stafford was already seated and about to say grace. Whitman stopped as he passed behind the farmer's chair, and clasping Stafford's head in his large, well-formed hands, became an actual part, as it were, in the benediction. Then he took his seat in silence. But that irrepressible joyousness which sometimes, after working on a manuscript, seemed to shine from his face and pervade his whole body,--that "singular brightness and delight, as though he had partaken of some divine elixir"--was visible now upon his noble features. He talked a little, in simple homely phrases,--giving little idea of the voluminous reserve force within him: telling little incidents of the War of Secession and anecdotes of his hospital experiences. He had been a volunteer nurse of exquisite patience and

admirable efficiency throughout those terrible years 1862-64. His passionate tenderness and sympathy then found vent: and he gave his best and uttermost: believing that (in his own words) "these libations, extatic life-pourings, as it were, of precious wine or rose-water on vast desert-sands or great polluted rivers, taking chances of \_no return\_--what are they but the theory and practice ... of Christ or of all divine personality?" For in the human, however defaced, he still could discern the divine and immortal. The worth of every individual soul was the pivot of all his arts and beliefs:

"Because, having looked at the objects of the Universe, I find there is no one, nor any particle of one, but has reference to the soul."

Usually, to his sensitive mind, able as it was to realise with the keenest sympathy every phase of human suffering, the memories of carnage were repulsive. By day he could shut them off: but by night, he said,

In clouds descending, in midnight sleep, of many a face in battle,  
Of the look at first of the mortally wounded, of that indescribable  
look,  
Of the dead on their backs, with arms extended wide--  
I dream, I dream, I dream.

( \_Old War Dreams.\_ )

But he had faith in the future of his country, vast hopes in the purification wrought out by those sorrowful years: and his poem \_To the Man-of-War Bird\_ was but one of many allegories in which he saw his beloved America rising transfigured from the ashes of the past.

Thou who hast slept all night upon the storm,  
Waking renew'd on thy prodigious pinions,  
(Burst the wild storm? above it thou ascended'st,  
And rested on the sky, thy slave that cradled thee,)....

Thou born to match the gale, (thou art all wings,)  
To cope with heaven and earth and sea and hurricane,  
Thou ship of air that never furl'st thy sails,  
Days, even weeks untired and onward, through spaces, realms gyrating,  
At dusk that look'st on Senegal, at morn America,  
That sport'st amid the lightning-flash and thunder-cloud,  
In them, in thy experiences, had'st thou my soul,  
What joys! what joys were thine!

and out of the smoke and din of conflict, he believed, should spring  
"the most splendid race the sun ever shone upon," knit in sublime unity  
of brotherhood.

Dinner over, Whitman retired awhile to his own apartment: that fearful  
chaos of pell-mell untidiness which was the delight of its occupant and  
the despair of Mrs. Stafford. An indescribable confusion it was of  
letters, newspapers and books,--an inkbottle on one chair, a glass of  
lemonade on another, a pile of MSS. on a third, a hat on the floor....  
Imperturbably composed, the poet surveyed his best-loved books,--Scott,  
Carlyle, Tennyson, Emerson,--translations of Homer, Dante, Hafiz, Saadi:  
renderings of Virgil, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius,--versions of Spanish  
and German poets: most well-worn of all, Shakespeare and the Bible.  
Finally, out of the heterogeneous collection he selected George Sand's  
\_Consuelo\_ and seated himself at the window with it. On another  
afternoon he would have returned to the creek, but to-day he was  
expecting a friend.

And friends, with him, did not mean mere acquaintances: still less those  
visitors who were brought by vulgar curiosity. Although the best of  
comrades and one who found companionship most exhilarating, he had a  
bed-rock of deep reserve, and "to such as he did not like, he became as  
a precipice." But to those with whom he was truly \_en rapport\_,--whether  
by letter or in the flesh,--he was spendthrift of his personality. His  
English literary friends,--Tennyson, Rossetti, Buchanan, Browning and  
others, had supplied the financial aid which enabled him to recuperate  
at Timber Creek: compatriots such as Emerson, John Burroughs, and a host  
of old-time friends were welcome visitors. But nothing in his life or in  
his literary fortunes, he declared, had brought him more comfort and  
support--nothing had more spiritually soothed him--than the "warm  
appreciation and friendship of that true full-grown woman," Anne  
Gilchrist, the sweet English widow who was now staying with her children  
in Philadelphia, to be within easy reach of Whitman. "Among the perfect  
women I have known (and it has been very unspeakable good fortune to  
have had the very best for mother, sisters and friends), I have known  
none more perfect," wrote the poet, "than my dear, dear friend, Anne  
Gilchrist." It was this warm-hearted, courageous Englishwoman, "alive  
with humour and vivacity," whose musical voice was shortly heard  
outside, enquiring for Walt. He hastened down to receive her.

[Illustration: THE MAN-OF-WAR BIRD.

Thou born to match the gale, (thou art all wings,)



To cope with heaven and earth and sea and hurricane,  
Thou ship of air that never furl'st thy sails,  
Days, even weeks untired and onward, through spaces, realms gyrating,  
At dusk that look'st on Senegal, at morn America,  
That sport'st amid the lightning-flash and thunder-cloud,  
In them, in thy experiences, had'st thou my soul,  
What joys! what joys were thine!

(\_To the Man-of-War Bird.\_)]

Anne Gilchrist's opinion of Whitman was even more enthusiastic than his appreciation of her. She admired and revered the courage with which he expounded his theories of life, no less than the expression of them in words which, as she put it, ceased to be words and became electric streams. "What more can you ask of the words of a man's mouth," she exclaimed, "than that they should absorb into you as food and air, to reappear again in your strength, gait, face--that they should be fibre and filter to your blood, joy and gladness to your whole nature?" She alone, of all women, and almost alone among men, had stood forth to defend him for the "fearless and comprehensive dealing with reality" which had alienated the conventional and offended the prudish--and she alone was the recipient, now, of his most intimate thoughts and aspirations.

They sat together on the shady piazza, and he unfolded to her, while her children played around, the hopes and wishes of his heart not only for America but for all humanity. He said, "My original idea was that if I could bring men together by putting before them the heart of man with all its joys and sorrows and experiences and surroundings, it would be a great thing.... I have endeavoured from the first to get free as much as possible from all literary attitudinism--to strip off integuments, coverings, bridges--and to speak straight from and to the heart; ... to discard all conventional poetic phrases, and every touch of or reference to ancient or mediæval images, metaphors, subjects, styles, etc., and to write \_de novo\_ with words and phrases appropriate to our own days." He took her hand as he spoke, as was his wont with a sympathetic listener, and gazed with eagerness into her serious yet easily-lighted face. His "terrible blaze of personality" was subdued for the nonce into that child-like simplicity, that woman-like tenderness, which constituted some of his chief charms.

They discussed the work of contemporary poets, English and American. Whitman, however much he differed from these in theory and method, gave generous homage to their varied genius. He loved to declaim the

\_Ulysses\_ and kindred majestically-rolling passages of Tennyson, in a clear, strong, rugged tone, devoid of all elocutionary tricks or affectation. He never spoke a line of his own verse, but to recite from Shakespeare was a great pleasure to him: and he compared the Shakespearean plays to large, rich, splendid tapestry, like Raffaele's historical cartoons, where everything is broad and colossal. For Scott, whose work, he said, breathed more of the open air than the workshop, he had unfeigned admiration. Dramatic work and music in all its forms he discussed with knowledge and fervour. As for the poets of America, he poured encomium upon them ungrudgingly. "I can't imagine any better luck befalling these States for a poetical beginning and initiation than has come from Emerson, Longfellow, Bryant and Whittier." (\_Specimen Days.\_)

The afternoon shadows stretched themselves out, and at sunset Mrs. Gilchrist and her children departed. It had been for her a memorable afternoon: and Whitman had been thoroughly in his element as comrade of so congenial a soul. Now, as the twilight deepened, he devoted himself to the consideration of the deepest notes in the whole diapason of human existence. Never was a man of more exuberant a joy in life: never one who gazed more courageously into the dim-veiled face of Death,--the sower of all enigmas, the comforter of all pain.

Whispers of heavenly death, murmur'd I hear;  
Labial gossip of night--sibilant chorals;  
Footsteps gently ascending--mystical breezes, wafted soft and low....

(Did you think Life was so well provided for--and Death, the purport  
of all Life, is not well provided for?)...  
I do not doubt that whatever can possibly happen, any where, at any  
time, is provided for, in the inherences of things;  
I do not think Life provides for all, and for Time and Space--but I  
believe Heavenly Death provides for all.

(\_Whispers of Heavenly Death.\_)

And his heart once more, as in the matchless threnody for Lincoln, \_When  
Lilacs last in the dooryard bloomed\_, uttered its song of summons and  
of welcome.

Come, lovely and soothing Death,  
Undulate round the world, serenely arriving, arriving,  
In the day, in the night, to all, to each,  
Sooner or later, delicate Death....

Dark Mother, always gliding near, with soft feet,  
Have none chanted for thee a chant of fullest welcome?  
Then I chant it for thee--I glorify thee above all.

The skies deepened into purple, and the march of the stars began: it was the sacredest hour of the day to Whitman, a period consecrated and set apart above all. "I am convinced," thought he, "that there are hours of Nature, especially of the atmosphere, mornings and evenings, addressed to the soul. Night transcends, for that purpose, what the proudest day can do." (\_Specimen Days.\_)

And a new buoyancy quickened in his soul; the indomitable spirit of enterprise revived within him. Now, at eleven at night, he was more exhilarated in mind than his body had been in the blue July morning: and, casting one comprehensive glance upon the burning arcana of the heavens, that he might carry into his sleep a memory of that glory, he "desired a better country," with longing and deep solicitude.

Bathe me, O God, in Thee, mounting to Thee,  
I and my soul to range in range of Thee!

\* \* \* \* \*

Passage to more than India!  
O secret of the earth and sky!  
Of you, O waters of the sea! O winding creeks and rivers!  
Of you, O woods and fields! Of you, strong mountains of my land!  
Of you, O prairies! Of you, gray rocks!  
O morning red! O clouds! O rain and snows!  
O day and night, passage to you!  
O sun and moon, and all you stars! Sirius and Jupiter!  
Passage to you!...

O my brave soul!  
O farther, farther sail!  
O daring joy, but safe! Are they not all the seas of God?  
O farther, farther, farther sail!

(\_Passage to India.\_)

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